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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000588

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SUBJECT: RWANDA NO "ISLAND" - KAGAME PREACHES REGIONAL  
STABILITY, INTEGRATION

REF: KINSHASA 796

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Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a September 13 meeting with visiting senior State Department officials, President Kagame said his country's future success depended on the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. Accordingly, Rwanda wanted closer ties with neighbors such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and was in favor of greater regional integration through the East African Community. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The Department's Senior Advisor for Innovation, Mr. Alec Ross, and Policy Planning Staff member Mr. Jared Cohen visited Rwanda and met with President Paul Kagame on September 13. Ambassador and poloff also attended; other Rwandan participants, all from the Office of the President, included strategy and policy unit chief Jean-Paul Kimonyo, communications director Yolande Makolo, and deputy personal private secretary Irene Zirimwagabago.

#### Rwanda's Regional Approach

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13. (C) In response a question from the Ambassador about how Rwanda viewed the region, Kagame said that even if Rwanda achieved success, such success would not last if Rwanda were "an island amidst chaos." Rwanda's success depended on the success of others, he explained, adding that Rwanda wanted to work with neighboring countries toward common goals--peace and security, economic development--so its own achievements would be durable. This was the logic behind Rwanda's desire for greater regional integration, including its decision to join the East African Community (EAC). "There are lots of divisions on this continent," Kagame noted, such as between anglophones and francophones. He said that when Rwanda announced its intent to join the EAC, some Europeans had asked whether Rwanda intended to quit francophone groupings such as the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL) or the Economic Community of Central African Countries (CEEAC). His response was that Rwanda saw no contradiction or conflict in being a member of all three. In his view, rather than causing problems, EAC membership "solves problems for us" by allowing Rwanda to be part of a bigger community and escape isolation. (Comment: Domestically, the GOR's decision to phase out the use of French language in favor of English has caused worry among many francophones. Political opponents and critics of Kagame have heavily criticized this decision and are lobbying for the Commonwealth to reject Rwanda's pending application for membership. At last report, however, it seems to be moving ahead. End Comment.)

## Relations with DRC and Tackling the FDLR

14. (C) Acknowledging USG support for improved relations between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kagame said that while he and DRC President Joseph Kabila have typically discussed "the usual issues" such as dealing with armed groups in eastern DRC, at their August 6 summit (see reftel) they also addressed cooperation on economic issues, including the Lake Kivu joint methane gas venture, linking the countries by fiber optic cable and adopting a common approach to climate change and environmental protection. Such initiatives, according to Kagame, "would cement our relations" and help the two countries work towards common interests. Regarding the threat to Rwanda from the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), in Kagame's view the "number one" challenge was to ensure that the FDLR no longer received any direct or indirect support in the DRC, including from the Congolese government. That is why Rwanda's cooperation with the DRC is so important, he emphasized. To achieve that goal, it was essential to isolate FDLR leaders politically. If that happened, there would be "no need to fire a shot." As for Rwandan interests in eastern Congo, he said Rwanda was concerned about the security of its methane gas project on Lake Kivu, but reiterated that Rwanda's "most important" interest was in partnering with and supporting the DRC in order to bring peace, stability and development to the wider region.

## Science & Technology

15. (C) On Rwanda's approach towards science and technology, especially information technology (IT), Kagame said the GOR

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sought to embrace IT as a means of reinforcing its efforts to invest in all other areas of development, including health and education. Within the GOR, some had argued that IT would divert resources from more pressing needs such as schools, health clinics or hunger, but, he asserted, it was not an either/or proposition. "In our case," explained Kagame, "everything is a priority. We have no luxuries." IT investment did not divert resources, it helped the GOR deal with problems in such as education (through distance learning), agriculture (by sharing information and knowledge with farmers) and health (by tracking patients, drug stocks, and providing long-distance medical advice). Once people have access to quality education and health care, he continued, they will be able to solve their own problems and not look to government for solutions. (Comment: This last habit will be difficult to break, as many Rwandans past and present have looked to government jobs and official patrons as the surest source of economic security. End Comment.)

## COMMENT

16. (C) Kagame's stated desire for regional stability, improved ties with neighbors such as the DRC, and greater economic cooperation reflect Rwanda's new reality. It can only grow its economy rapidly enough to meet its expanding population's rising expectations by becoming part of a regional economy linked to global markets and capital. The most valuable elements of Rwanda's economy lie within a few miles of its borders with the DRC, Uganda and Burundi: its sources of energy (hydro today, methane tomorrow), main tourism sites, and best agricultural land (producing tea, coffee and food). However, it cannot secure its future growth by securing only its immediate borders. Rwanda must push economic integration to transform itself from a country at the "end of the line" into a "regional hub."

17. (C) In describing relations with the DRC, Kagame did not dwell long on the FDLR threat, nor did he mention Rwanda's own history of intervention in the DRC before its early 2009

joint operations with the DRC against the FDLR. The largely unheralded August 6 Kagame-Kabila summit in Goma, DRC, reflected a paradigm shift for many. That meeting confirmed in the minds of many Rwandans (and, perhaps, many in the FDLR) that both presidents were committed to a partnership with each other and not armed groups. Our challenge, and that of other international supporters of peaceful development in Central Africa, is to find concrete ways to provide a market-linked "peace or partnership dividend" to reinforce this critical shift. END COMMENT.  
SYMINGTON